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AUTHOR	Nihei, Koichi
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how to teach listening so that English-as-a-Second-Language students can develop a level of listening ability that is useful in the real world, not just in the classroom. It asserts that if teachers know the processes involved in listening comprehension and some features of spoken English, they can provide students with appropriate advice and effective listening practice. Three chapters focus on the following: (1) "The Current Situation of Teaching Listening in Japanese High Schools" (teaching listening in English classes and recognizing the need for improvement); (2) "The Listening Process for Comprehension and Some Features of Spoken English" (bottom-up and top-down processing, schema theory, reduced forms of spoken English, performance variables and redundancy, and rhetorical markers, and skills for listening); and (3) "Improved Approach" (basic skills for listening comprehension should be taught, schema-building activities should precede the listening activity, students should learn strategies for effective listening, students should listen to a variety of authentic materials, and post-listening strategies should be integrated with other skills, such as reading, writing, and speaking). (Contains 28 references.) (SM)

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How to Teach Listening

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Koichi Nihei
Fukushima-Minami Senior High School
Fukushima Prefecture, Japan
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How to Teach Listening

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Introduction

Listening is an important skill for the person who is learning English because in verbal communication we cannot communicate with each other without listening to the speaker's utterances and understanding them. In addition, everyone wants to listen to what English speakers are saying at a natural speed and understand it. Everyone wishes to understand English films, TV programs, music, and announcements. In other words, the purpose of learning English is to communicate in the real world.

However, listening is a very demanding and challenging skill for the learners to master. Every non-native speaker has had an experience of talking to English speakers and not being able to respond to them because they couldn't understand what they were saying. Everyone has had an experience that when he or she listened to the English announcements at an airport or a train station in foreign countries, they couldn't understand them at all. This inability is definitely not an exaggeration for the average Japanese English-learners who have been taught English for 6 or 10 years at junior high school, senior high school, and university.

Considering what I have mentioned in the two paragraphs above, there is a big gap between the demands and needs of the learners and their real ability. What has caused this gap? To what extent could we, as Japanese English teachers, solve this problem by improving our teaching methods? This is my starting point.

To bridge this gap, in this paper I would like to discuss those teaching methods in which the process of listening is emphasized, and skills and strategies for effective listening are fostered. First, I will explain the English teaching situation in Japanese high schools and point out some problems in terms of teaching listening. Second, I will discuss the listening process for comprehension which teachers should know in order to teach listening effectively. Next, I present and explain some features of spoken English which students have difficulty in tackling. Finally, I will propose an improved approach to teaching listening comprehension.

I. The current situation of teaching listening in Japanese high schools

A. The teaching of listening in English classes

Many students often encounter trouble in listening to foreign people even though they are doing well in the English classroom. Some students complain to teachers that, although they can understand what ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers)[1] are saying because they speak slowly and clearly, they cannot understand what native English speakers are saying in real life. Why does this problem happen? What is wrong with the teaching of listening in Japanese schools?

The first and probably the biggest problem is that, although the importance of listening skills is widely acknowledged in Japan, the adequate teaching and materials to develop them have not been provided. In a typical listening lesson, students either listen just to the taped script of a reading textbook or, after listening to some materials, they answer multiple choice questions based on the content of listening materials. In this kind of lesson, correct answers are emphasized, but the listening process necessary to decode the information is ignored, and the kinds of skills and strategies for effective listening are not practiced. That is, students are just tested on their own ability to answer correctly and are not taught how to listen to English.

Second, the amount of time for listening lessons is limited in English I and II, compared with reading, writing, and speaking. For example, it is estimated that the average time devoted to listening activities in every class is 5 minutes per day. Students are not sufficiently exposed to a variety of authentic materials, either. In short, although they are accustomed to English spoken clearly and slowly in classroom materials and can understand it, they get embarrassed and frustrated when they encounter real English which is spoken at a normal speed. Third, they are not used to the difference between spoken English and written English. Spoken English has different features such as ungrammatical utterances, false starts, hesitation, assimilation, and redundancy. If they aren't familiar with those phenomena, they may not be able to listen to English and understand it.

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[1] ALTs are the native speakers of English who are hired as assistant teachers under the name of the JET program (the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program).

Lastly, in listening lessons, teachers don't have the specific notion that listening should be integrated with other skills, i.e., speaking, reading, and writing. When real world communication is examined, we never finish verbal communication appropriately without doing something after listening. For example, when we have a conversation with someone, we have to respond to him or her. It is never just one way communication. In a situation like a lecture in which students are listening to the instructor, they usually take notes. We can think of many other situations in which listening is integrated with the other three skills. In real world communication, that is, listening, speaking, reading, and writing are interrelated and interdependent.

B. The recognition of the need for improvement

What is the purpose of language education? Promoting the ability of students to pass entrance examinations must not be the main purpose. Neither must teaching English which is acceptable only just in the classroom. The Course of Study which will be implemented in 2003 puts further emphasis on the development of students' fundamental and practical communication skills such as listening and speaking. This is a natural progression in the age in which, due to the rapid development of internationalization and globalization, we will definitely have much more opportunity than now to use English in order to communicate with people all over the world. Without a doubt, the ability to communicate in English in real life situations continues to be essential. Furthermore, the ability to understand all kinds of English, including some accent features, will also be necessary so that we Japanese people can communicate successfully with all people who speak English. To fulfill this purpose, we, as English teachers, must improve the methods of teaching listening so that our students can learn how to listen, and foster skills and strategies for effective listening so that our students can understand authentic spoken English.

II. The listening process for comprehension and some features of spoken English

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss both the listening process involved in comprehension and some features of spoken English. The intention is to understand the listening process for learners to grasp the meanings of messages, to learn certain features of spoken language which students have trouble in understanding, to acknowledge the skills which students should develop, and to learn how to make good use of what we know is necessary for effective teaching.

To do so, this chapter will be divided into three main sections: the first two sections are theoretical, viewing the listening process for comprehension and the features of spoken English; the third section discusses the skills needed for listening.

A. Listening processes

According to Rubin (1995), "For second language/foreign language learners, listening is the skill that makes the heaviest processing demands because learners must store information in short term memory at the same time as they are working to understand the information" (p. 8). Furthermore, as she explains, "Whereas in reading learners can go over the text at leisure, they generally don't have the opportunity to do so in listening" (p. 8). O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper (1989) claim that "listening comprehension is an active and conscious process in which the listener constitutes meaning by using cues from contextual information and from existing knowledge..." (p. 434). It is, of course, clear that we cannot see and observe the cognitive process of listening. However, understanding the listening process can help us to rethink the methods of teaching listening. For this purpose, there are two key components for clarifying the listening process: the first is bottom-up and top-down processing; the second is schema theory.

1. Bottom-up and top-down processing

Listening is an active process for constructing meaning in which two kinds of processes are involved simultaneously: bottom-up and top-down processing. Richards (1990) explains these two as follows:

Bottom-up processing

Bottom-up processing ... refers to the use of incoming data as a source of information about the meaning of a message. From this perspective, the process of comprehension begins with the message received, which is analyzed at successive levels of organization – sounds, words, clauses, and sentences – until the intended meaning is arrived at. Comprehension is thus viewed as a process of decoding. (p. 50)

Top-down processing

Top-down processing refers to the use of background knowledge in understanding the meaning of a message. Background knowledge may take several forms. It may be previous knowledge about the topic discourse, it may be situational or contextual knowledge, or it may be knowledge stored in long-term memory in the form of "schemata" and "script" – plans about the overall structure of events and the relationships between them. (p. 51)

Peterson (2001) defines top-down processing as the higher level process "driven by listeners' expectations and understandings of the context, the topic, the nature of text, and the nature of the world" (p. 88). On the other hand, he defines bottom-up processing as the lower level process "triggered by the sounds, words, and phrases which the listener hears as he or she attempts to decode speech and assign meaning" (p. 88).

In listening comprehension, these two, top-down and bottom-up processing, are correlated in a complex relationship and both are used to construct meaning. To construct the meaning, listeners are not passively listening to speakers or information but are actively reconstructing the speakers' intended meaning and getting meaningful information by decoding the sounds, words, and phrases. As Buck (1994) explains, to arrive at an understanding of the message, listeners must understand the phonetic input, vocabulary, and syntax (bottom-up processing), and, at the same time, use the context of situation, general knowledge, and past experiences (top-down processing) (p. 118). According to O'Malley et al. (1989), "In general, the effective listeners [make] use of both top-down and bottom-up processing strategies, while ineffective listeners [become] embedded in determining the meaning of individual words" (p. 434).

For example, suppose that a Japanese tourist goes to a supermarket in Washington D.C. and, at the register, is asked by a cashier, "Paper or plastic?" What kind of knowledge is needed to understand this utterance? Even if the tourist could perceive the cashier's every word (bottom-up processing), it would not be sufficient

for comprehension. In this event, if the tourist didn't have the contextual knowledge of the situation (top-down processing), namely, that in America at some supermarkets, customers are usually asked about whether they prefer a plastic bag or a paper bag, he or she couldn't understand the cashier's utterance. Therefore, if listeners cannot use top-down processing effectively and successfully, speakers' utterances or messages cannot be understood. The reverse is also true. Without a bottom-up ability, listeners cannot make good use of top-down processing. In short, for fluent listening, both top-down and bottom-up processing are needed.

2. Schema theory

Schemata, or scripts, are closely related to top-down processing in listening comprehension. "Background information (schemata) is an important factor in listening" (H. D. Brown, 2001, p. 258). "When applied to the process of comprehending a foreign language, the advantage of activating learners' scripts in an appropriate situation is obvious" (Long, 1989, p. 33). Specifically, in a situation where learners must use a foreign language, if they cannot activate schemata suitable for the situation, they have difficulty (Nunan, 1999, p. 201). Moreover, Nunan asserts that "without these schemata, nothing in life would be predictable, and if nothing were predictable, it would be impossible to function" (p. 202). In other words, since foreign language learners don't have enough linguistic knowledge, they have to predict meaning by activating schemata, thereby compensating for what they cannot decode in speech.

What is schema? Chiang and Dunkel (1992) explain this as follows:

> The basic tenet of schema theory posits that written text, or spoken discourse, does not carry meaning in and of itself. Rather, meaning occurs as a result of the interaction between the reader's or listener's prior knowledge about the world and the text or speech. This world knowledge is rooted in life experiences and enables individuals to make inferences and form expectations about commonplace situations. (p. 350)

Moreover, they state that if there is a difference of schemata between the speaker and listener, the listener cannot make use of relevant schemata, and may misunderstand the speaker's intention (p. 350).

According to Richards (1987), "Much of our knowledge of the world is

organized around scripts, that is, memory for typical episodes that occur in specific situations" (p. 223). He concludes that "our knowledge of dentist's scripts, cinema scripts, library scripts, drugstore scripts, school scripts, meal scripts, and so on, enables us to interpret a great deal of the language of everyday life" (p. 223).

For example, if a Japanese family with little children were familiar with the custom that, at Union Station in Washington D.C., elderly people or families with little children have priority to board trains, when they hear the announcement of priority boarding, they would respond appropriately. However, if they weren't, they might not understand the announcement. Therefore, "non-native speakers ... may lack many culturally specific scripts" (Richards, 1987, p. 223).

B. Some features of spoken English

Concerning the features of spoken English (my second theoretical focus), it is essential to note that spoken English is different from written English. Scarcella and Oxford (1992) state that "ordinary speech contains many ungrammatical, reduced, or incomplete forms; it also has hesitations, false starts, repetitions, fillers [e.g., 'uh,' 'um,' 'yeh'], and pauses, all of which make up 30-50 % of any informal conversation" (p.146). H. D. Brown (2001) argues that second language learners need to be cognizant of and attend to some features of spoken language because, if they don't do so, their listening processes will be negatively influenced and their comprehension much hindered. (p. 252) In short, if learners have not been exposed to false starts, repetitions, fillers, and pauses, they will not understand what speakers intend in their utterances. In addition, according to Buck (1995), "When speaking, we can convey a great deal without even saying it: our tone of voice, intonation, facial expressions, and gestures can add a great deal to a message, and can even convey the exact opposite to what our actual words would suggest" (p.115). Therefore, it is important for teachers to know the features of spoken English for teaching listening effectively.

In this section, I will introduce three specific features of spoken English which Japanese high school students are not accustomed to and which cause difficulties: 1) reduced forms; 2) performance variables and redundancy; 3) rhetorical markers.

1. Reduced forms

In speech, "patterns of assimilation are common, leading to the disappearance of

word boundaries, to the omission of certain vowels and consonants" (Richards, 1987, p. 224): got to [gotta], give me [gimme], don't know [donno]. These sounds are very hard for Japanese students to hear and distinguish as meaningful units. Even advanced learners sometimes get frustrated. However, students have to get used to these patterns of assimilation, and "it is essential for the teacher to be aware of their existence and the troubles they cause" (Ur, 1984, p. 19).

2. Performance variables and redundancy

In spoken language, grammatical errors, false starts, repetitions, fillers, and pauses are common. However, these phenomena can also prevent Japanese students from understanding speakers' utterances. The reason is that they are not frequently exposed to the kind of speech which includes grammatical errors, false starts, repetitions, fillers, and pauses. They are used to the following speech:

> M=Mary Carlos=C
> M: How were the fireworks?
> C: Oh, they were huge. They went off at 600 meters up in the sky and were 650 meters in diameter. We saw them from a tent.
> M: That sounds great. And how about the hot springs?
>
> (Hello there! Teachers manual, p. 98)

On the other hand, real speech is different from the above example. H. D. Brown (2001) gives the following example:

> But, uh – I also – to go with this of course if you're playing well – if you're playing well then you get uptight about your game. You get keyed up and it's easy to concentrate. You know you're playing well and you know ... in with a chance then it's easier, much easier to – to you know get in there and – and start to ... you don't to think about it. I mean it's gotta be automatic. (p. 253)

Japanese students have to get used to speech such as in H. D. Brown's example. Furthermore, they have to know that redundancy could be a cue that the information is important. For example, speakers sometimes convey important information after, "I mean," or "You know." As H. D. Brown (2001) claims, "learners have to train themselves to listen for meaning in the midst of distracting performance variables" (p. 253).

3. Rhetorical markers

Students must also be conscious of the functions of rhetorical markers, such as "First," "Second," "But," "Because," etc. For example, words like "first" and "second" tend to signal that speakers are conveying important information or organizing main points. Mendelsohn (1994) concludes that teachers should train students to notice this kind of speech and make use of this information to focus their attention.

C. Skills for listening

Based on the listening process and features of spoken English discussed in the above paragraphs, this section focuses on the skills necessary for developing good listening ability. Skills are "competencies which native listeners possess and which non-natives need to acquire in relation to the language they are learning" (Field, 1998, p. 117). Teachers should instruct students to know that "achieving skill in listening requires as much work as does becoming skilled in reading, writing, and speaking in a second language" (Morley, 2001, p. 72). Therefore, teachers have to know which skills are needed for effective listening and instruct students to develop these skills.

The following skill classification is adopted from an article by Richards (1987).

1. ability to recognize reduced forms of words
2. ability to distinguish word boundaries
3. ability to detect key words (i.e., those which identify topics and propositions)
4. ability to guess the meanings of words from the contexts in which they occur
5. ability to recognize cohesive devices in spoken discourse
6. ability to distinguish between major and minor constituents
7. ability to recognize the communicative functions of utterances, according to situations, participants, goals
8. ability to reconstruct or infer situations, goals, participants, procedures
9. ability to use real world knowledge and experience to work out purposes, goals, settings, procedures
10. ability to predict outcomes from events described
11. ability to infer links and connections between events
12. ability to distinguish between literal and implied meanings
13. ability to recognize markers of coherence in discourse, and to detect such relations as main idea, supporting idea, given information, new information, generalization, exemplification
14. ability to process speech containing pauses, errors, corrections
15. ability to make use of facial, paralinguistic, and other clues to work out meanings

16. ability to adjust listening strategies to different kinds of listener purposes or goals

How can skills for effective listening be developed? I support Rost's contention that skills are "better learned when aspects of the skill are practiced in 'clusters' rather than in minimal units" (Rost, 1990, p. 150). In other words, it is not until several skills are involved and practiced in one lesson that they can be effectively developed and improved.

In the next chapter, I would like to discuss what teachers should do in order to develop these skills. To do so, I will propose an improved approach.

III. Improved approach

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss an improved approach to develop the skills which are explained in chapter II. I will discuss the following five suggestions: 1) basic skills for listening comprehension should be taught; 2) schema-building activities should precede the listening activity; 3) students should learn strategies for effective listening; 4) post-listening activities should be integrated with other skills, such as speaking, reading, and writing; 5) students should listen to a variety of authentic materials.

A. Basic skills for listening comprehension should be taught

1. Understanding word boundaries and reduced forms

Basic skills include perceiving the differences in intonation and knowing what they mean, perceiving stressed or unstressed words, understanding word boundaries and reduced forms, etc. Among them the one that makes Japanese students confused most is to understand word boundaries and reduced forms. Therefore, in this section I will explain how to treat this problem.

In listening comprehension both bottom-up and top-down processing are used to arrive at an understanding of the utterances. If either of them is lacking, we cannot arrive at an exact understanding. For example, if students cannot perceive three or four words out of five words of one speaker's utterance (bottom-up processing), they cannot make guesses or inferences, using their own background knowledge (top-down processing).

Ur (1984) states that "if a word is pronounced differently in informal speech from the way it is said formally, or was said when it was learned, the listener may simply not recognize it as the same word, or may even miss its existence completely" (p. 17-18). Mendelsohn (1994) claims that "there is a certain level of linguistic proficiency that is required in order to handle listening comprehension" (p. 69). Therefore, as one step of arriving at this level of linguistic proficiency, teaching students reduced forms of words and word.boundaries is very important.

2. How to teach them

Two types of lessons should be taken into consideration. One is that

the lesson be introduced first at the beginning of the course and be taught systematically throughout the course using commercial textbooks for reduced forms. The example below is extracted from "Whaddaya Say?" (Weinstein, 2001, p. 41):

Part 1 Introduction

Conversation

Listen to each part of the conversation: first spoken with careful (slow) pronunciation; then spoken with relaxed (fast) pronunciation.

Careful (Slow) Pronunciation	**Relaxed (Fast) Pronunciation**
JOE: My tooth's driving me crazy.	JOE: My tooth's drivin' me crazy.
GEORGE: Then you've got to make an appointment with a dentist.	GEORGE: Then you've gotta make an appointment with a dentist.
JOE: I've got to find one first. I don't have a dentist.	JOE: I've gotta find one first. I don't have a dentist.
(Continued)	(Continued)

The other is that the lesson involved in a different kind of listening activity. In this case the following procedure can be used:

1) First, students listen a few times to the contextual material, including reduced forms of words and word boundaries without seeing transcripts of the material Through this activity, teachers should help students guess or predict by asking them questions, "How many words can you distinguish?" After listening a few times, as a class or in pairs, students can discuss how many words they are able to distinguish and then listen to the material to confirm what they have heard.
2) Then, students see the transcripts of the material and, if necessary, the rules of reduced forms of words and word boundaries are taught or reviewed.

However, we should keep in mind the following two cautions:

1) If teachers emphasize the importance of this ability too much, students will be

likely to focus on every word as they listen without grasping the main point of the messages.

2) Materials should not be too difficult for students, and words and phrases which students have already learned should be appropriate for this activity.

B. Schema-building activities should precede the listening activity

1. The need for schema-building activities

As Dunkel (1986) reports, "Effective communication depends on whether the listener and speaker share a common 'semantic field'" (p. 103). In short, without common schemata or scripts between the speaker and listener, effective communication will not occur. It is natural that Japanese learners are lacking in the same schemata that English speakers have. Students have to activate schemata to "build this bridge between the 'new' that they are hearing and that which they already know" (Mendelsohn, 1994, p. 55). Therefore, teachers should "provide listeners with the background information needed to understand the message before asking students to listen to a segment of discourse" (Dunkel, 1986, p. 101), thereby activating schemata.

2. How to activate students' schemata

How can teachers activate students' schemata? Different researchers give different examples. Richards (1987) states as follows:

> They [schema-building activities] may take the form of discussion, questions, or a short paragraph to read which creates the script, providing information about the situation, the characters, and the events. (p. 234)

Oxford (1993) introduces the following suggestions:

> Pre-listening tasks (e.g. discussing the topic, brainstorming, presenting vocabulary, sharing related articles) must be used to stimulate the appropriate background knowledge and help learners identify the purpose of the listening activity. (p. 210)

Mendelsohn (1994) urges the following to activate schemata:

> In the first stage, through discussion, the teacher judges how much prior

> knowledge there is on the topic. In the second stage, through appropriate questions such as, "What made you think of that?" the initial associations are extended, and the discussion also enables students to benefit from the thoughts of other students. Finally, in the third stage, students have an opportunity to modify their initial thoughts based on what they have thought of and heard in the second stage. (p. 56)

As can be seen, there is one common element that all three researchers include in schema-building activities. That is to discuss the topic with students in order to activate schemata. In short, a schema-building activity involves not only teachers giving students background knowledge which they are lacking, but also teachers helping them to activate schemata to fill in the gap between the listener and speaker. Based on this concept, I will divide schema-building activities into four categories.

The first is that teachers determine how much background knowledge about the topic students have by asking some questions. The second is that teachers either give students an opportunity to discuss the topic (as a class, in groups, in pairs) in order to activate schemata they already have, or they give students short readings or present visual aids which are related to the situation, characters, and events of the topic. In this stage, if necessary, some vocabulary should be given. These activities result in stimulating students' interest and making them aware of the reason for listening. The third is that teachers ask students to guess and predict the actual content of the listening materials before listening to them. The fourth is that students have an opportunity to adjust the difference between their first thoughts about the content of the topic and the actual content of the listening material.

C. Students should learn strategies for effective listening

1. The need for effective listening strategies

In foreign language listening, most times the learners cannot comprehend all of what the native speaker says. Even in our own native language, for various reasons we sometimes might not understand everything the speaker says. In fact, we guess when we don't completely understand something that we have heard and predict what will come next. However, language learners tend to forget this fact. As Ur (1984) insists, "They have a kind of compulsion to understand everything, even things that are totally unimportant, and are disturbed, discouraged and even completely thrown off balance if they come across an incomprehensible word" (p. 14). If learners adjust this attitude

regarding listening, they will become more effective listeners. As Mendelsohn (1994, p. 110) concludes, some strategies, such as guessing, inferencing, etc., should be taught to the learners to compensate for the lack of understanding. (p. 110) Moreover, "through these, students will not only become better listeners, they will also become more effective language learners" (Nunan, 2001, p. 218).

2. Classification of strategies

What kinds of listening strategies are there? How are they classified? Researchers classify listening strategies in different ways. H. D. Brown (2001) emphasizes that teaching effective listening strategies improves the chance of students' becoming good learners, and he presents the following eight strategies:

1. looking for key words
2. looking for nonverbal cues to meaning
3. predicting a speaker's purpose by the context of the spoken discourse
4. associating information with one's existing cognitive structure (activating background information)
5. guessing at meanings
6. seeking clarification
7. listening for the general gist
8. various test-taking strategies for listening comprehension

(p. 259)

Nunan (2001) urges teachers to make the learners conscious of what they are doing and of the process of learning and introduces the following eight strategies:

1. listening for gist
2. listening for purpose
3. listening for main idea
4. listening for inference
5. listening for specific information
6. listening for phonetic distinctions
7. listening for tone/pitch to identify speaker's attitude
8. listening for stress

(p. 219)

Mendelsohn (1995) divides listening strategies into seven major categories:

1. strategies to determine setting
2. strategies to determine interpersonal relations
3. strategies to determine mood

4. strategies to determine topic (where this is not known in advance; for example, when coming in on the middle of a discussion or presentation)
5. strategies to determine the essence of the meaning of an utterance
6. strategies to form hypotheses, predictions, and inferences
7. strategies to determine the main idea of a passage

(p. 138)

I would like to adopt a simplified classification so that students can learn strategies with ease. I will divide the strategies into five kinds: 1) listening for the gist (main ideas); 2) listening for specific information; 3) listening to predict; 4) listening to make inferences; 5) using non-verbal cues.

Listening for the gist (main ideas)

In this listening, students are not asked detailed questions. For example, they might just be asked the following general questions: "Where are the speakers talking?" "What are they taking about?" "Why are they talking?" In short, students have to grasp the main ideas without worrying about the details.

Listening for specific information

In this listening, students are asked the following more detailed questions, such as "What time did this event happen?" "Who are they talking about?"

Listening to predict

It is impossible for students to catch all the information as they listen. Thus, they have to guess what they cannot understand or what would come next by using many clues, such as speakers' gestures and facial expressions, rhetorical markers, key words, their own world or topic knowledge, etc. For example, if listeners hear the words "one of the most important things is...," they can predict that the speaker will say an important thing next. In this listening activity students would be asked the following questions: (after listening to a conversation) "Can you guess what words will be said next?"; (after watching a film without sound) "By observing speakers' gestures and facial expressions, can you guess what words are being said?"

Listening to make inferences

Inferences are different from predictions. Take the following example:

A= a son B= a mother
A: I'm going out to play tennis.
B: It's cold outside, isn't it?

To understand this brief exchange listeners must infer, and then possibly conclude, that since it is cold outside, the mother's intention is that the son should not go out. If students listen to the above dialogue, the following question would be asked; "What does the mother mean?" That is, in this type of listening, students need to understand that "everything is comprehensible, but there is meaning to the discourse that exceeds the understanding of each of the utterances or parts of it" (Mendelsohn, 1994, p. 105).

Using non-verbal cues

Using non-verbal cues means paying attention to paralinguistic signals. Paralinguistic signals include body language, gestures, facial expressions, speakers' lip movements, settings of where conversations take place, etc. Although these visual cues are very important to understand what speakers say, in teaching listening the importance of these signals is often ignored. However, given the fact that listening on the telephone is very difficult for the learners, the significance of using the visual cues should be clear. Teachers should instruct students to take advantage of these visual cues in listening lessons. To do so, using and analyzing videos will be necessary.

3. How to teach the strategies

In teaching the strategies, lessons should be structured so as to guide the students through the listening process. The kind of lesson in which students just listento the whole segment and answer questions without any instructions must be avoided because it would be testing not teaching. That is, while students are actually listening, teachers should make them aware, before hand, of what they should be listening for in the message, and, moreover, how they should do it. In other words, teachers should make students do focused listening, such as "listening for gist,"

"listening for main ideas," "listening for specific information," etc.

To do so, the following example can be applied in the classroom. As a "listening for gist" activity, students might be given material in which a conversation is taking place at a bank and, before listening, might be asked to listen for the answers to the following two questions: 1) Where is this conversation taking place? 2) What makes you think that? The purpose of the question "Where is this conversation taking place?" is to make students do focused listening and to be aware of the reason for listening. The purpose of the question "What makes you think that?" is to make students aware of what to do in the process of listening. Some students might look for key words. After listening, students might have discussions as a class or in pairs to answer the two questions. Some students may respond "a bank," judging from the words "deposit" and "dollars" which they could hear. Others may respond "a shop," judging only from just the word "dollars." Although teachers wouldn't give the answer at this stage, they should write down the words "deposit," "dollars," etc., on the blackboard. After finishing the discussion, students listen to the material again so that they can confirm if their answers are correct.

Through the above activity, teachers can make students aware of the effectiveness of the strategies they use and, as G. Brown (1995, p. 71) mentions, give the students the experience of success. Even if students cannot arrive at a correct answer, they can experience the importance of and the effectiveness of using the listening strategies.

D. Post-listening activities should be integrated with other skills, such as speaking, reading, and writing

As I have mentioned in chapter I, in real life, after listening, we never finish verbal communication without doing something. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are interrelated and interdependent. In light of this point, appropriate classroom activities should be considered. That is, listening must be integrated with speaking, reading, and writing. As Mendelsohn (1994) states, "This [post-listening activity] is a good opportunity to integrate the listening with work in other skills, for example, by having students do a piece of writing or oral reporting on what they have been listening to" (p. 57). Furthermore, as Hedge (2001) claims, "Post-listening work can also usefully involve integration with other skills through development of the topic

into reading, speaking, or writing activities. If materials follow this route, it becomes important to ensure that new sources of motivation arise for students other than the interest of the original text" (p. 252). For example, listening to the news of an accident may encourage students to read related articles and to convey what they have heard to other people. Listening to an impressive story may motivate students to write their thoughts or opinions about it. Therefore, making good use of post-listening activities leads to developing students' language abilities and motivating students because they can feel they are learning language as meaningful communication.

As post-listening activities, I will present the following two examples:

1) After watching some part of a film and comprehending it, students create their own dialogues by themselves and, after that, students share them with the class. In this way listening is integrated with writing and speaking.
2) After listening to the news, students read related articles excerpted from the newspaper, and, after that, they write their own opinions and share them with the class. Here, listening is integrated with reading, writing, and speaking.

E. Students should listen to a variety of authentic materials

1. The need for authentic materials

The purpose of language learning is that the learners can come to make use of the target language in the real world, not just in the classroom. However, if the learners are accustomed to artificial materials, they cannot fulfill this purpose. As Herron and Seay (1991) claim, "Teachers are urged to exploit more authentic text (e.g., video and film, radio broadcasts, television programs) in all levels of foreign language instruction in order to involve students in activities that mirror 'real life' listening contexts" (p. 488). Moreover, as H. D. Brown (2001) explains, "Authentic language and real-world tasks enable students to see the relevance of classroom activity to their long term communicative goals" (p. 258). Namely, authentic materials facilitate students to become involved in the classroom activity. Furthermore, listening to authentic texts gives learners useful practice to grasp the information needed without necessarily understanding every word or structure. (Herron and Seay, 1991, p. 493)

2. How to teach with them

Of course, authentic materials, such as films, TV programs, real conversations, etc., frequently contain fast speech, redundancy, ungrammatical utterances, etc., which tend to cause students to feel confused, frustrated, and de-motivated. However, this can be solved by choosing appropriate materials for students which are challenging and interesting, and by assigning tasks which involve focused listening such as "listening for gist," "listening for main ideas," etc. In short, as Lund (1990) claims, "difficulty [of authentic materials] should be considered an attribute of tasks rather than texts" (p. 113). Even difficult materials could be useful for developing listening ability by giving students simple tasks. To give an example, students could listen to a radio commercial to know what product it is advertising. To give another example, students listen to just the headlines of the news to know how many news stories there are.

In using appropriate materials, three aspects should be taken into consideration. The first is that teachers should make students aware of the importance of not trying to completely understand authentic materials; they should encourage them to make good use of their partial comprehension. (Guarientor and Morley, 1990, p. 348) Namely, teachers should facilitate students to predict meaning based on their partial comprehension. The second is that teachers need to teach students how to listen to authentic materials. To realize this purpose, the following suggestions and procedure offered by Dunkel (1995) would be effective:

> The listeners are given needed background information about the general topic to activate their schema and help them predict some of the content of the message; learners listen to the discourse segment(s) at least four times with varied and focused listening tasks set for each listening; the comprehension tasks proceed from the general to the specific and detailed; and the learners are asked to discuss and react to the information heard after the final listening cycle. (p. 102)

In other words, as I have discussed in the above sections, by activating students' schemata, doing focused listening, and emphasizing the process of listening, authentic materials can be used for fostering students' listening ability.

The last variable to consider when using authentic materials is, as Porter and Roberts (1987) claim, that authentic activities are needed. For example, the kind of activity in which, after listening to a weather forecast on radio, students decide what clothes to wear when they go out, is also needed. In short, teachers don't ask students

for one correct answer, but facilitate students to decide what to do based on listening and learning. This activity enables students to feel they are learning English as real communication and for a useful purpose.

F. Concluding comments of this chapter

In this chapter I have discussed an improved approach to develop students' listening ability. Five aspects of the approach are indispensable for effective teaching. Thus, teachers should always be aware of the five aspects when designing lesson plans for listening comprehension.

In the activities which I have suggested, the same procedure doesn't need to be followed every time. For example, in schema-building activities, I have divided them into four categories. However, relevant activities can be combined and others not used. Based on the materials and the degree of students' schemata, sometimes just a discussion about a topic can be enough.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined how to teach listening so that students can develop a level of listening ability which will be useful in the real world, not only in the classroom. It is my belief that if teachers know the process involved in listening comprehension and some features of spoken English, they can provide students with appropriate advice and effective listening practice. For this purpose, in chapter II, I have discussed the process of listening comprehension and some features of spoken English. Then, in chapter III, I have proposed an improved approach.

In listening lessons, students should be taught how to listen. In light of this notion, the approach I have proposed would be effective because the process of listening comprehension is emphasized and the strategies for effective listening are required. Through this kind of lesson students can learn how to listen, and what they have learned can be applied to real life listening.

This approach can be exploited in Japanese high school classrooms by making use of a variety of listening materials available in Japan. We have many kinds of materials, such as bilingual TV programs, films, commercial materials, etc., which can be used to develop students' listening ability. Whether they are used as listening materials or not is up to the teachers' creativity and belief in their value. Based on those materials, a variety of lesson plans can be developed and introduced into the classroom.

However, I don't propose that we, as Japanese English teachers, will be able to drastically and immediately improve the current condition of teaching listening in high schools. There cannot be a perfect method of teaching listening. My intention with this paper is to take a small but steady step toward improving students' listening ability. Furthermore, this small step will be linked with further steps when they use English in the real world after graduating from high school. In other words, we should help and encourage students to utilize what they have learned. To fulfill this purpose, I believe that the approach I have proposed will be effective.

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Signature: Koichi Nihei

Printed Name/Position/Title: Koichi Nihei

Organization/Address: 28 Maehata Miyashiro Fukushima-shi Fukushima-ken, Japan

Telephone: 024-553-4432

FAX: 024-553-0676

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